MARVEL
Prelude to
EXCALIBUR
X-MEN LEGENDS #12
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X-MEN LEGENDS

KURT WAGNER
NIGHTCRAWLER

KITTY PRYDE
SHADOWCAT

IRENE ADLER
DESTINY

FORGE

RAVEN DARKHÖLME
MYSTIQUE

THE HARRIERS

ZEKE SALLINGER
SHOTGUN

BOBBI CHASE
BLINDSIDE

HARRY MALONE
HARDCASE

TOM NAKADAI
WARHAWK

JESUS SUAREZ
RANGER

LOUIS JOUBERT
TIMEBOMB

AMELIA GREER
LONGBOW

JEROME HAMILTON
BATTLEAXE

ANDREI SEMYANOVITCH ROSTOV
PISTON

Combining their life forces to defeat an unstoppable foe, the X-Men disappeared. Now, the world--including Nightcrawler and Kitty, who are recovering from injuries that make it difficult to even use their powers--believes they're dead...

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START AGAIN: A PRELUDE TO EXCALIBUR

BY CHRIS CLAREMONT & SCOT EATON

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WAS ZUM--?!

FUZZY-ELF, I DON'T THINK WE'RE ON *MUIR ISLAND* ANYMORE.

HEY, *LOCKHEED*, WHY AREN'T YOU BOTHERED?

IT LOOKS LIKE *NIGHTCRAWLER* AN' I'VE JUST BEEN *KIDNAPPED*.

-Enhnh!-

KURT-- I SEE A *BODY* OVER THERE?

AND STANDING BEHIND IT-- IS THAT *DESTINY*?!

THE WOMAN IS **IRENE ADLER**. AS HER CODENAME, DESTINY, IMPLIES, SHE HAS THE ABILITY TO PERCEIVE THE FUTURE.

TOGETHER WITH HER COMPANION, THE SHAPE-CHANGER **MYSTIQUE**, SHE HAS LONG BEEN ONE OF THE X-MEN'S DEADLIEST ADVERSARIES. NOW, AS LEADERS OF **FREEDOM FORCE**, THEY WORK FOR THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT.

WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH US, WOMAN?

YOUR *HELP*, KURT WAGNER.

MYSTIQUE HAS GONE MAD WITH GRIEF OVER THE DEATH OF ROGUE.*

SHE HOLDS *FORGE* RESPONSIBLE. SHE WANTS HIM TO PAY IN KIND.

SHE WANTS HIM *DEAD*.

I TOLD HER THAT IS A MISTAKE--

--CAPABLE OF SHATTERING THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE OUTRIGHT.

SHE DOES NOT CARE.

*THIS STORY OCCURS IN THE DIRECT AFTERMATH OF **UNCANNY X-MEN #227** & PRIOR TO THE EVENTS OF **EXCALIBUR SPECIAL EDITION #1**. THE WORLD THINKS ROGUE, AND THE REST OF THE X-MEN, ARE DEAD, AS SEEN IN THE "FALL OF THE MUTANTS" CROSSOVER (1987). --X-CAL MARK

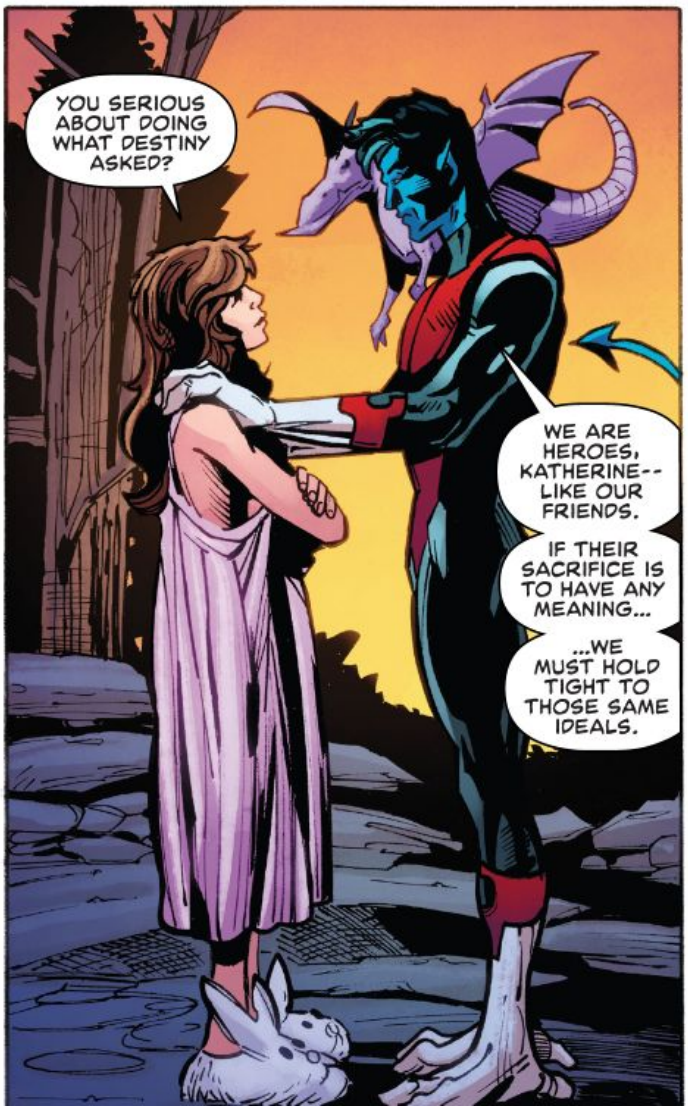
I COULD NOT STOP HER, NIGHTCRAWLER.
YOU MUST.
AND WITH THOSE WORDS, DESTINY'S IMAGE FADES AWAY, LEAVING KURT AND KITTY ALONE IN THE EVENING TWILIGHT...

WHOEVER THIS MAN IS, HE'S UNCONSCIOUS.
NO SIGNS OF OVERT WOUNDS.
MYSTIQUE'S GETTING CARELESS.

HOW DID DESTINY DO THIS, I WONDER?
FIRST FINDING US, WHEN WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BE SAFELY HIDDEN ON MUIR ISLE, THEN TRANSPORTING US HERE--WHEREVER "HERE" IS.

CLEARLY, WORKING FOR THE GOVERNMENT AS FREEDOM FORCE HAS GIVEN MYSTIQUE AND IRENIE ACCESS TO SURPRISINGLY IMPRESSIVE RESOURCES.
SHE'S BROUGHT OUR "COSTUMES" AS WELL.
I'M GETTING CHANGED, KATZCHEN. YOU SHOULD DO THE SAME.

I ALMOST DIED IN THIS OUTFIT.
NO WAY DO I PUT IT ON AGAIN-- EVER!


YOU SERIOUS ABOUT DOING WHAT DESTINY ASKED?
WE ARE HEROES, KATHERINE-- LIKE OUR FRIENDS.
IF THEIR SACRIFICE IS TO HAVE ANY MEANING...
...WE MUST HOLD TIGHT TO THOSE SAME IDEALS.

SOMETIMES BEING A HERO REALLY SUCKS!
SCOUT THE NEIGHBORHOOD, DRAGON.
LET'S SEE WHAT'S WHAT.
YAHYAHYAH!

SUR-PRISE!
KITTY, LOOK-- OW?!
HEAD'S UP, HARDCASE.
WE GOT COMPANY.
ONE'S A KID-- OTHER'S IN COSTUME.
SOK!
DOESN'T LOOK LIKE THEY'LL BE TOO MUCH TROUBLE--
--WHOA!
ROAR!
HOLY--!
BOSS, THEY GOT A DRAGON!
IT BREATHES FIRE!
STAY FOCUSED, KITTY.
HOLD ON TIGHT.
TIME FOR US TO...
...GO!
BAMF!

NO SIGN OF THE INTRUDERS.
THEY BOTH JUST-- VANISHED.
DEMON-GUY SURE LEFT A STINK BEHIND 'EM.
SHOTGUN'S DOWN.
GONNA NEED LIFELINE TO CHECK HIM OUT.
COPY THAT, BLINDSIDE.
STAY LOOSE, STAY FROSTY, BACKUP'S ON THE WAY.
HARDCASE.
WARHAWK, YOU DEAL WITH THE DRAGON.
TAKE RANGER WITH YOU.
LONGBOW, I NEED YOUR EYES ON THE ROOF.
AS SOON AS TIMEBOMB FLUSHES OUT THE INTRUDERS--
--YOU TAKE 'EM DOWN.
BUT HEAR THIS, HARRIERS:
YES, WE WERE HIRED BY A NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR TO PROTECT FORGE.
THAT SAID, NOBODY USES LETHAL FORCE WITHOUT MY SPECIFIC SAY-SO.
THE "DEMON" SOUNDS LIKE THE X-MAN NIGHTCRAWLER.
WHICH MEANS I WANT THESE MUTANTS--AND THEIR DRAGON--TAKEN ALIVE.

THANK HEAVEN-- I CAN STILL TELEPORT.
I FEEL AWFUL--BUT KITTY IS IN FAR WORSE SHAPE.
KITTY?
'M OKAY.
I THINK.
I HOPE.
I'M SORRY, KURT--
--I REALLY WANNA GO HOME.
BALD, KATZCHEN-- SOON.
YOU STAY HERE--
--LOCKHEED, YOU KEEP HER SAFE.
LEAVE THE REST TO ME.
GIMME A BREAK--
--BOTH OF US NEARLY DIED FIGHTING THE MARAUDERS.
WE DO THIS, WE DO IT TOGETHER.
WAS IST--?!!
B-DOOM B-DOOM B-DOOM!
SOMEONE'S SHOOTING AT US--
--WITH BOMBS!

FIRST SALVO DELIVERED.
BET THAT GOT THEIR ATTENTION.
TIMEBOMB'S TALENT IS EXPLOSIVES.
HARDCASE ASKS, HE DELIVERS--BIG OR LITTLE, THE KIND THAT POP A LOCK--OR LEVEL A BUILDING.
B-DOOM
B-DOOM
B-DOOM
LOCKHEED'S IMMEDIATE RESPONSE, TO FIND HIS FRIENDS A WAY TO SAFETY--
--AND DEAL WITH THE SOURCE OF THIS ATTACK AS WELL.
DRAGON'S IN MY SIGHTS, WARHAWK.
SHALL I DROP HIM?
NO NEED, LONGBOW.
CONSIDER HIM NAILED.

WARHAWK.
GOTCHA, MONSTER!
YOU ARE SO LUCKY THE BOSS WANTS YOU ALIVE--
GLORY!
BATTLEAXE.
WHAT THE--?!
YAAAGHH!
MEIN GOTT--
--KATZCHEN!?!
(SOMETHING'S HAPPENED TO LOCKHEED--)
(--AND IT'S AFFECTING HER JUST AS BADLY.)*
*KURT'S THOUGHTS ARE IN HIS NATIVE GERMAN. --DEUTSCHE MARK
PISTON. RANGER. BLINDSIDE.
THE GIRL'S SCREAMING.
THAT'S NO GIRL.
BECAUSE THOSE ARE TWO VOICES, BOUND TOGETHER:
THE GIRL AND THE DRAGON!
FORGE-- WITHIN THE CHALET.
KITTY!
OH, NO-- NO!
I NEVER MEANT FOR ANYTHING LIKE THIS TO HAPPEN.
I TELL MYSELF I'M DOING GOOD--
--BUT ALL I SEEM TO DO IS HURT THOSE I CARE FOR.

WARHAWK.
GOTCHA, MONSTER!
YOU ARE SO LUCKY THE BOSS WANTS YOU ALIVE--
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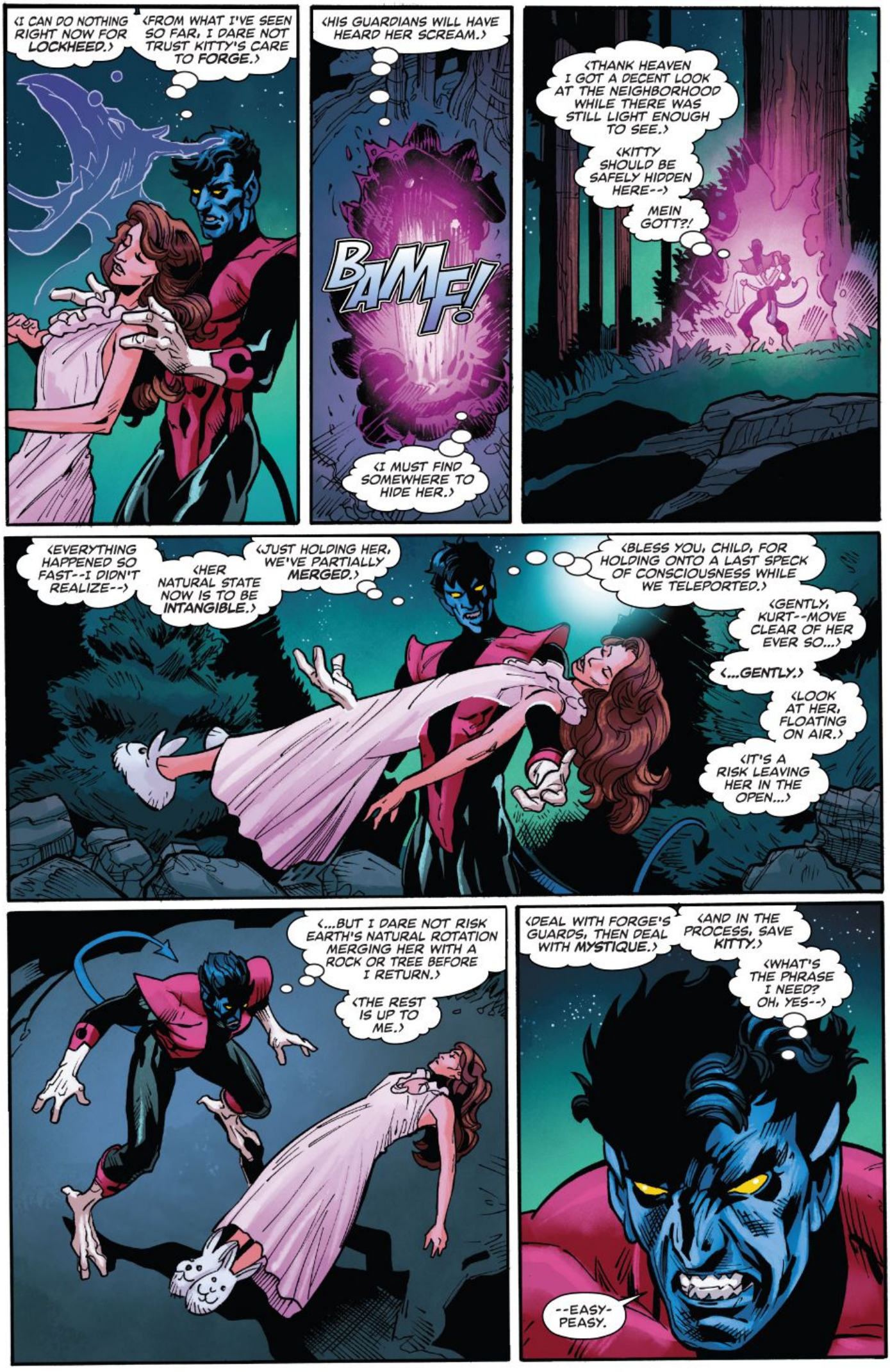
‹I CAN DO NOTHING RIGHT NOW FOR LOCKHEED.›
‹FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN SO FAR, I DARE NOT TRUST KITTY'S CARE TO FORGE.›
‹HIS GUARDIANS WILL HAVE HEARD HER SCREAM.›
BAMF!
‹I MUST FIND SOMEWHERE TO HIDE HER.›
‹THANK HEAVEN I GOT A DECENT LOOK AT THE NEIGHBORHOOD WHILE THERE WAS STILL LIGHT ENOUGH TO SEE.›
‹KITTY SHOULD BE SAFELY HIDDEN HERE--›
MEIN GOTT?!
‹EVERYTHING HAPPENED SO FAST--I DIDN'T REALIZE--›
‹HER NATURAL STATE NOW IS TO BE INTANGIBLE.›
‹JUST HOLDING HER, WE'VE PARTIALLY MERGED.›
‹BLESS YOU, CHILD, FOR HOLDING ONTO A LAST SPECK OF CONSCIOUSNESS WHILE WE TELEPORTED.›
‹GENTLY, KURT--MOVE CLEAR OF HER EVER SO...›
‹...GENTLY.›
‹LOOK AT HER, FLOATING ON AIR.›
‹IT'S A RISK LEAVING HER IN THE OPEN...›
‹...BUT I DARE NOT RISK EARTH'S NATURAL ROTATION MERGING HER WITH A ROCK OR TREE BEFORE I RETURN.›
‹THE REST IS UP TO ME.›
‹DEAL WITH FORGE'S GUARDS, THEN DEAL WITH MYSTIQUE.›
‹AND IN THE PROCESS, SAVE KITTY.›
‹WHAT'S THE PHRASE I NEED? OH, YES--›
--EASY-PEASY.

GUYS, WHATEVER HAPPENED, IT WASN'T MY FAULT!
ALL I DID WAS WHAT I WAS TOLD!
CRITTER'S STILL BREATHIN', JUST OUT COLD-- WHAT'CHA WANT I SHOULD DO NOW?
HAVE YOU NOT ALREADY DONE ENOUGH?
KICK
BOSS, EVERYONE, THE MUTIE-DEMON JUST POPPED OUTTA NOWHERE--
--AN' THEN HE VANISHED!
SURPRISE, VILLAIN--I'M BAAAAACK!
MONSTER'S DOIN' SOMETHIN' TO MY RIG!
THAT'S THE LEAST OF YOUR TROUBLES.
WHERE ARE WE? WHAT'S HAPPENING? WHAT DID YOU DO?!
OH MY GO--!
BAMF

IT'S CALLED TELEPORTING.
WASN'T SURE BEFORE NOW IF I COULD DO IT EVEN ONCE, MUCH LESS CONSTANTLY IN BATTLE.
MEIN GOTT, HOW I HURT.
TALK ABOUT LEARNING NEW LIMITS THE HARD WAY.
BUT I CAN'T STOP NOW, TOO MUCH IS AT STAKE.
JUST NEED TO STAY HERE A MOMENT FIRST...
...TO CATCH MY BREATH.
I'VE GOT TOMMY, HARDCASE. UNHURT, LOOKS LIKE, JUST KO'D.
DEMON SEEMS TO BE PLAYIN' AS NICE WITH US...
...AS YOU WANT US TO PLAY WITH IT--
--OH CRAP!
BLINDSIDE?
BOBBI, D'YOU HEAR ME?
HARRIERS, THIS IS HARDCASE. THREE OF US ARE DOWN.
BAMF

THERE, GUYS, IN THE LIGHT!
WE GOT HIM!
DANGEROUS MISTAKE, MONSTER-BOY.
BOOM BOOM BADOOM!
DUMB MOVE LIKE THAT GETS YOU BRACKETED BY MY BOMBS.
KEEP HIM CENTERED IN THE LIGHTS!
I DON'T WANT TO LOSE HIM!
CRIPES, HE'S GOOD.
JUST KEEP HIM HOPPING, LOUIS. I'LL DO THE REST.
SOMETHING-- DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT.
IF HE CAN TELEPORT, WHY'S HE RUNNING?
MAYBE HE'S HURT-- REMEMBER THAT SCREAM?
I DON'T FEEL THAT LUCKY.
IF YOU HAVE A BEAD ON THE TARGET, AMELIA--
THAT'S THE IDEA, HARRY.
C'MON, GOBLIN, ALL I NEED'S ONE MISTAKE AND--
OH NO!

PISTON, LOOK OUT!
SURPRISE!
IT'S ALL ABOUT TIMING, AND KNOWING PRECISELY WHERE YOU ARE.
KURT'S MOVING SO FAST, WITH THE TWO HARRIERS FOLLOWING SO CLOSE BEHIND...
...THAT THEY LOSE TRACK OF WHERE THEIR TARGET IS IN RELATION TO THEIR TEAMMATE...
...UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE.
MEANWHILE, ELSEWHERE...

THE GOBLIN PLAYED US!
BOSS, PISTON'S DOWN--
--AND WE'VE LOST CONTACT WITH THE ADVERSARY!
HARRY, HE'S HERE!
‹SO FAR--›
‹--SO GOOD.›
‹JUST NEED A FEW MOMENTS TO CATCH A DECENT BREATH--›
‹SOMEONE'S BEHIND ME--›
OH!

〈MEIN GOTT-- THIS ONE'S EVEN BIGGER THAN HIS FRIENDS!〉
〈CANNOT LET HIM DELIVER ANOTHER HIT LIKE THAT!〉
〈BREAK FOR ME.〉
〈MY TAIL CAUGHT HIM OFF GUARD.〉
〈FINGERS CROSSED MY LUCK HOLDS JUST A FEW MINUTES MORE--〉
〈APPARENTLY TOO MUCH TO HOPE FOR.〉
〈HE'S AS FAST AND AGILE AS I AM--!〉
OW!
〈CAN'T TAKE ANOTHER HIT--〉
〈--TIME TO TELEPORT--〉
〈--NOTHING'S HAPPENING!〉
GOTCHA!

HARDCASE, WHAT THE DEVIL'S HAPPENING HERE?
THAT'S NIGHTCRAWLER-- ONE OF THE X-MEN!
I DON'T WANT THIS, I NEVER WANTED THIS--
--STOP IT, NOW!
FORGE, YOU CAN'T BE HERE. WE NEED TO KEEP YOU SAFE.
LET US HANDLE THIS, THE SCENE'S TOO DANGEROUS.
YEAUGH!
SURE GOT THAT LAST BIT RIGHT.
LET'S EVERYBODY BEHAVE--
--SO THINGS DON'T GET ANY NASTIER THAN THEY ALREADY HAVE, 'KAY?
FORGE, WHAT THE DEVIL ARE YOU DOING?
ENDING THIS STUPID FIGHT BEFORE IT GETS ANYMORE OUT OF HAND.
TELL YOUR TEAM TO STAND DOWN, MALONE, THAT'S AN ORDER.
WHAT THE--?!
DON'T BE ALARMED, PLEASE.
I'M-- WE'RE--TRYING TO HELP.
MYSTIQUE, THIS HAS ALL GONE FAR ENOUGH--
--YOU HAVE TO STOP.
IF YOU MEAN TO KILL THIS MAN...
...YOU'LL HAVE TO GO THROUGH ME.

YOU THINK I'M BLUFFING?
STATE YOU'RE IN, WAGNER, I BET EVEN YOU CAN'T DODGE A POINT-BLANK BULLET TO THE HEAD.
TRUTH IS, YOU BOTH LOOK PRETTY NEAR THE END OF YOUR STRINGS.
I BET THE BRAT CAN'T KEEP YOU INTANGIBLE MUCH LONGER.
MOMENT SHE SLIPS, I SHOOT, YOU DIE.
SO DO IT.
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, MYSTIQUE?
WE'RE MORTAL ADVERSARIES--HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE BEEN DOWN THIS ROAD?
WHY HOLD BACK NOW?
ROGUE IS *DEAD.*
FOR THAT WE *ALL* GRIEVE. WE ALL WANT VENGEANCE.
BUT WALKING THIS PATH WILL LIKELY DESTROY EVERYTHING YOU VALUE.
IT WILL LEAVE DESTINY *ALONE.*
IS THAT REALLY WHAT YOU WANT?

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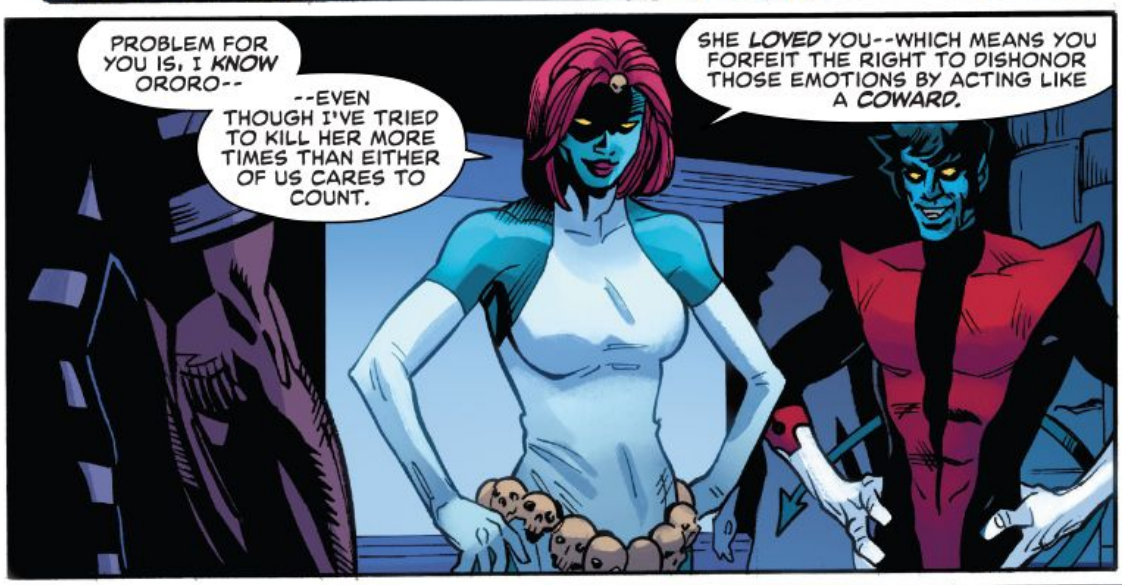
KURT--
--WHAT'S HAPPENING?!
FIGHT'S FINALLY CAUGHT UP WITH ME, OF COURSE.
WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?
YOU ARE SUCH *IDIOTS*, YOU KNOW THAT? BOTH YOU AND THE *BRAT*.
WE'RE X-MEN, THIS IS WHAT WE DO.
ALTHOUGH I SUSPECT THIS MAY BE FOR THE LAST TIME.
EVEN IF WE RECOVER, OUR SUPER HERO DAYS ARE DONE.
KNOWING THE RISK, YOU FOUGHT ANYWAY?
LOGAN AND I HAVE TALKED OF YOU, OF HOW HE KNEW YOU AS A HERO.
NOW YOU LEAD *FREEDOM FORCE*, A TEAM OF HEROES.
I HOPED YOU MIGHT REACT AS THAT.
YOU HAVEN'T KILLED FORGE, HAVE YOU?
WANTED TO, I THOUGHT WITH ALL MY HEART. TURNED OUT, I WAS JUST BLUFFING.
YOU'VE CHANGED.
I HAD A BETTER IDEA.
TRUTH IS, I *HAVE* CHANGED. IN MANY WAYS I HATE.
BUT I FIND I CAN'T GO BACK.
ROGUE'S CHOICE TO BE A HERO--TURNS OUT IT'S INFECTIOUS.
I'M BECOMING AS CRAZY AS HER. AS--
--YOU.

CURSE YOU, SHAPE-SHIFTER, WHY DIDN'T YOU KILL ME?
YOU KNEW THAT'S WHAT I WANTED--WHAT WE BOTH WANTED.
WEREN'T YOU PAYING ATTENTION? I'M A HERO.

BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN I CAN'T BE NASTY.
DEATH IS TOTALLY WHAT YOU DESERVE FOR WHAT YOU DID--
--BUT THAT'S FAR TOO EASY.


PROBLEM FOR YOU IS, I KNOW ORORO--
--EVEN THOUGH I'VE TRIED TO KILL HER MORE TIMES THAN EITHER OF US CARES TO COUNT.
SHE LOVED YOU--WHICH MEANS YOU FORFEIT THE RIGHT TO DISHONOR THOSE EMOTIONS BY ACTING LIKE A COWARD.

NOW'S YOUR CHANCE TO PROVE YOURSELF WORTHY OF THAT LOVE, AND HER SACRIFICE.
SAVE THE BRAT. I WON'T HAVE A CHILD'S BLOOD ON MY HANDS, EVEN BY ACCIDENT.

SAVE NIGHTCRAWLER.
MAKE THEM BOTH WHOLE.
THAT'LL MAKE US EVEN.

WHAT? WHY?!
PERHAPS SOMEDAY, SWEET BOY, I'LL TELL YOU.
TILL THEN, CONSIDER IT THE COURTESY OF A NASCENT HERO.
NEXT TIME, KURT, YOU CAN SAVE ME.

WELL?
I'LL-- TRY MY BEST.

AND SO--
--BACK ON MUIR ISLAND...
ONE MUST ADMIT, FORGE DOES GREAT WORK.
HIS THERAPY HELPED, BUT IT'S STILL GOING TO TAKE A WHILE TILL WE'RE FULLY FIGHTING FIT.
WITH ONE SLIGHT EXCEPTION--
--AND ONE BIG HURDLE:
MY PERMANENT, NATURAL STATE APPEARS TO BE INTANGIBLE.
I REALLY AM A "GHOST-GAL."
TAKES SOME GETTING USED TO, FUZZY-ELF.
THAT SAID, WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?
I HAVE FAITH.
SHORT ANSWER, KATZCHEN, WHEREVER WE LIKE. AND DO WHATEVER WE WANT--
--BUT, KITTY, I GET THE FEELING SOMETHING MORE IS ON YOUR MIND.
CAN I HELP?
DUNNO. SINCE WE GOT BACK, I'VE BEEN HAVING THESE WEIRD DREAMS--
--ABOUT RACHEL.
WONDER WHAT THEY MEAN?
AND SO--
EXCALIBUR
BEGINS.

NEXT:

And the rest is history, True Believers! Thanks for joining us for this special prelude to EXCALIBUR and for coming along with us on the X-MEN LEGENDS ride this past year. But hate and fear not—we'll be back in just two months with the start of an all-new volume of X-MEN LEGENDS, delving further into the untold tales of Marvel's Merry Mutants from across the decades! Next, Roy Thomas will kick off a heretofore unknown story set between his seminal X-MEN runs and the landmark GIANT-SIZE X-MEN, involving Wolverine's post-Hulk, pre-X-Men missions, the unrevealed story of the missing mutants in that time period, and a secret connection between two stars of the X-Men mythos! Dave Wachter will be there to bring it all to life, so be sure to put an X on your calendars for this one! --Mark

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